

Profiles of Anticipated Support: Religion's Place in the Composition of Americans' Emotional Support Networks

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In this article we analyze the role of religion in the composition of Americans' networks of anticipated emotional support. Drawing on data from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life, which contains information on multiple sources of potential emotional support, we use latent class analysis to uncover four different anticipated support profiles, which are organized along two dimensions of variation: religiosity and breadth. We label these profiles religious, secular, broad, and limited. Our analyses demonstrate associations between these anticipated support profiles and a person's gender, family status, age, race, socioeconomic status, and religious involvement. For instance, we find that Catholics are more likely than non-Catholics to have secular rather than religious support profiles, and African Americans tend to have profiles that are either religious or limited. Finally, we show that these profiles have implications for well-being. We contribute to research on religion and emotional support by describing how religious and secular sources combine into overall anticipated support profiles. Our conclusion addresses the implications of these findings for current scholarship on religion and emotional support networks.

Keywords: *emotional support, social support, religion, well-being.*

INTRODUCTION

Emotional support is vital to human thriving. Strong emotional support is linked to a variety of positive physiological and psychological outcomes (Cohen 2004; Fiala, Bjorck, and Gorsuch 2002) and to coping in the face of stressful life circumstances (Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005). In contrast, social isolation has been associated with a range of negative outcomes, including increased risks for depression, suicide, and low self-esteem (Hall-Lande et al. 2007), along with lower levels of physical health in elderly populations (Cornwell and Waite 2009). While received emotional support is crucial to well-being, so too is belief that support will be available if needed. Researchers call this expectation of support perceived or anticipated emotional support (Krause 2006).

People receive and anticipate emotional support from a variety of sources, including family members (Birditt and Antonucci 2007; Swartz 2009), friends, neighbors, and co-workers (Carbery and Buhrmester 1998; Dahlin, Kelly, and Moen 2008). Religious communities, including clergy and friends from church, provide another significant source of emotional support (see Ellison et al. 2009 and Krause 2006 for summary reviews). These religiously-based networks are particularly well suited to providing emotional support because they are large and stable, and

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co-religionists often share similar worldviews (Ellison and George 1994; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Research on nonreligious sources of support has demonstrated the importance of understanding emotional support networks as broadly composed of varying levels of support that cohere into overall packages of support resources (Cutrona and Russell 1987; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Liebler and Sandeful 2002; Wellman and Wortley 1990). However, these compositional studies have virtually ignored the unique contributions of religious sources of support. Likewise, much of the scholarship on religious support tends to neglect contributions from nonreligious sources. As a result, we lack a full picture of people's anticipated and received emotional support networks that includes both religious and nonreligious resources.

We set out to investigate the ways in which Americans anticipate drawing on both religious and nonreligious sources of emotional support and combining them into overall profiles of support. Our analysis has three objectives. First, we identify how people combine religious and nonreligious sources into overall profiles of anticipated emotional support. Next, we determine how membership in these anticipated support profiles varies according to differences in gender, age, income, race, and religious affiliation. Finally, we demonstrate the implications of these new profiles for our understanding of personal well-being by briefly exploring associations with life, family, and job satisfaction along with overall relationship happiness.

Our study contributes to general scholarship on anticipated emotional support by showing the importance of including religious sources in analyses of overall support profiles. For some Americans, religion is the primary nonfamily source of emotional support; research that does not include measures of religious support would mischaracterize the nature of the available and anticipated support such Americans receive. This is especially true for African Americans.

Our study also has implications for scholarship on religion. Recent critiques of standard approaches in the sociology of religion caution against tendencies to assume a strong, unitary "religion effect" on behavior and to overemphasize the positive and prosocial aspects of religion (see Edgell 2012 for a review). We apply these insights to the study of religion and social support by highlighting the variable and contextual contribution of religious resources to people's overall anticipated support profiles.

Our findings sustain the view that religious communities are important sources of connection and support for many Americans (Ellison and George 1994; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Religion is an organizing dimension of anticipated emotional support, and over half our sample would turn to some religiously-based support source. However, this does not mean that everyone utilizes religiously-based social support in the same way. For some, religion is a crucial part of the overall package, for some it is only one of many sources, and for others it is largely irrelevant—and this is true even of those who are religiously involved themselves. Just as religiously-based social capital is not equally available to or utilized in the same way by all members of a given religious community (see Edgell 2012 for a review), we show how Americans vary in the role that religiously-based support plays in their overall profiles of anticipated support.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

The literature review that follows focuses on four areas pertinent to this study. First, we address the differences between perceived support (the focus of this study) and actual or received support. Next, we describe the existing research on compositional patterns of emotional support, highlighting the importance of understanding the full package of support networks. Third, we explore the connections between social location and support sources, highlighting the ways that different people construct their emotional support networks. Finally, we briefly discuss the implications of social support for personal well-being.

Perceived Emotional Support

In this study we focus on perceived support. Perceived emotional support is not the same as actual or mobilized support. Rather, it is a distinct phenomenon in its own right—an appraisal that, should a need arise, a particular person would be (at least potentially) available and willing to provide emotional support (Gottlieb and Bergen 2010). Some have called this “anticipated” support (Krause 2006). Perceived support is important because during a life challenge, the perception that adequate support resources are available can reduce stress and provide the confidence needed to formulate positive coping strategies (Terry, Rawle, and Callan 1995). Recent scholarship has revealed that anticipated support has a direct affect on well-being regardless of whether those supportive connections are actually mobilized (Gottlieb and Bergen 2010; Lawrence 2006). In fact, perceived support can often be more beneficial to health because it comes with a feeling of being connected to a community without the lower sense of self-esteem that is potentially associated with dependency on others’ support (Krause 2006).

People are naturally most likely to mobilize social support that they perceive to be available to them, and thus, perceived support is associated with increased levels of mobilization (Lawrence 2006). Furthermore, people’s beliefs about the availability of support are strongly linked to experiences of receiving support in the past, suggesting an ongoing interaction between perceived and activated support (Krause 1997; Wethington and Kessler 1986).

In the analysis that follows, we determine if there are patterns in people’s anticipated support networks. Respondents’ choices, which span religious and secular sources of potential support, are used to develop a number of profiles that describe the compositional patterns of perceived emotional support networks.

Compositional Patterns of Emotional Support: Bringing Religion In

Emotional support, like social support more generally, is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Particularly important are relationships with parents (Wellman and Wortley 1990), spouses (Birditt and Antonucci 2007), and, for some, extended kin networks (Swartz 2009). Friends, neighbors, and co-workers are another common source of social support, though they tend to have a lesser role than family in the provision of instrumental support (Dahlin, Kelly, and Moen 2008).

Next to family, religious organizations are for many one of the most important sources of social support in the United States (Ellison et al. 2009; Krause 2006). Ellison and George (1994) found that compared to nonchurchgoers, those who regularly attend religious services have larger social networks (cf. Putnam and Campbell 2010) from which they receive more types of social support more frequently. In addition to friendships, religious communities provide access to religious professionals, who can be another significant source of social and emotional support (see Ellison et al. 2006 for a review).

When a distressing circumstance arises, people usually do not rely exclusively on one source of social support. Rather, they tend to package support sources in various ways (Cutrona and Russell 1987; Wellman and Wortley 1990). Building on this insight, more recent research has used latent class analysis (LCA) to study the ways in which Americans combine different kinds of social connections to create distinct profiles of support. Hogan and colleagues (1993) were the first to conduct a study of social support using LCA. Drawing from variables that measure different dimensions of social exchange, they profiled four groups of low exchangers, high exchangers, givers, and receivers. Subsequent research has extended these initial findings, emphasizing differences based on marital status and gender (Liebler and Sandefur 2002).

These studies on the compositional patterns of support create a more comprehensive picture of supportive relationships, establishing that different kinds of social connections contribute to social support in different ways. However, the previous studies have one serious drawback. They each

neglect the significant contribution that religious communities make to many people's networks of social support. Our study brings religious resources back in, building on compositional research by considering the contributions of this important source of support.

Social Location and the Composition of Emotional Support

Gender, age, life course events, race, and religious involvement are all associated with different patterns of support networks. Gender may be particularly relevant in determining differences in social support (see Schwarzer and Gutierrez-Dona 2005 for a wide-ranging review). Women have broader support networks in general (Liebler and Sandefur 2002) and are more likely to turn to friends for emotional support (Carbery and Buhrmester 1998). Additionally, women tend to be more religiously involved and more likely to draw upon their religiously-based social capital than men (Peek, Lowe, and Williams 1991).

Though the relationship between supportive networks and aging is complex and varied (Shaw et al. 2007), a strong body of research has shown that as people grow older, their support networks tend to decrease either through life stage events such as retirement or the death of friends and family (Rook 2009), or through conscious choices to winnow down their networks (Carstensen, Fung, and Charles 2003). Though it is not always the case, reduced support networks can mean that, on the whole, elderly people receive lower levels of social support as they begin to face increasing needs for assistance (Taylor and Chatters 1988).

Life course events such as marriage and having children can affect the size and structure of social networks (Bidart and Lavenu 2005; Liebler and Sandefur 2002). They can also affect people's religious connections (Edgell 2006; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). Socioeconomic status has a significant impact on social relationships. Higher levels of education and income are associated with increases in emotional support (Mickelson and Kubzansky 2003). For many, work is an important source of social support (Hochschild 1997); people working full time may have more supportive relationships from work than from other contexts (Moore 1990).

Racial and ethnic differences in social support are also evident in previous studies. For instance, Mexicans tend to place great importance on extended family relationships (Kana'iaupuni et al. 2005). African Americans, especially in the South, often rely heavily on the church for social support (Krause 2002), and their church involvement tends to overlap with kin and community-based ties (Ellison and George 1994; Ellison and Sherkat 1995).

Finally, religious involvement can affect the level of support that people receive. Taylor and Chatters (1988) found that church attendance and a subjective sense of religiosity were highly correlated with an increased likelihood of support (cf. Ellison and George 1994). In addition, they found denominational differences between Catholics and Baptists, with Catholics being less likely to receive support from fellow parishioners than their Protestant counterparts.

These studies show that a wide variety of individual factors contribute to the prevalence and effectiveness of a given individual's social support network. But how do these factors fit together as a whole? Taken together, are there overall patterns in associations between these demographic factors and the profiles of anticipated support that people might turn to in meeting their emotional support needs? These issues will be addressed in the analysis that follows.

Patterns of Support and Well-Being

Recent research has established that social network composition can greatly affect a person's sense of well-being. Studies of older adults found that those who have more diverse social networks have higher morale and experience increased levels of mental health (Litwin 2001). Other studies demonstrate that the quality of certain categories of relationships (with a partner, with family, or with friends) have positive or negative implications for well-being (Walen

and Lachman 2000). Given these findings, it is reasonable to assume that broad patterns of social support may be linked to well-being; however, previous studies that have sought to uncover these larger patterns or profiles of support have not addressed the potential connection between the two (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Liebler and Sandefur 2002; Wellman and Wortley 1990). This is another gap in the research that we seek to address through analysis of the linkages between perceived support profiles and one particular aspect of well-being: life satisfaction.

DATA

Our profiles of perceived emotional support were constructed using data from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life (NSRFL), a 2006 study of working-age adults ages 18–79. The NSRFL is a nationwide telephone survey ($N = 2,403$) containing questions that focus on family relationships, work-family management, and respondents' religious beliefs and practices. Households were selected for participation using random-digit dialing (RDD). One adult respondent was then selected at random within each household. Oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics were obtained by dialing within area codes with at least 10 percent concentrations of these subgroups. Surveys were conducted in Spanish if requested by the respondent. The data were weighted to match the gender and age distribution of the United States and to account for survey design characteristics, including oversampling and nonresponse. All reported analyses use these survey weights.

To improve the response rate, notification letters, refusal conversion letters, and noncontact letters were mailed to all sampled households for which addresses were available. The overall cooperation rate (the proportion of all cases interviewed of all eligible units ever contacted that complete the survey) was 54 percent, with higher cooperation rates in the race/ethnic oversamples. The response rate (the number of complete interviews with reporting units divided by the number of eligible reporting units in the sample) for the NSRFL was 36 percent.¹ Although the response rate is low by traditional standards, it compares favorably with most recent national RDD-based studies (CMOR 2003). Moreover, some studies show few differences between surveys with high response rates (e.g., the Current Population Survey) and RDD-based surveys with lower response rates. They also show relatively little evidence of nonresponse bias in RDD surveys (Keeter et al. 2000; Pew Research Center 2004). However, significant concerns about noncoverage (including households with no phone or no landline phone) and declining response rates among RDD surveys have led survey researchers to begin to evaluate different survey designs (Link et al. 2008).

METHODS AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Our study takes a new approach to conceptualizing compositional support patterns by focusing on respondents' perceptions of their potential religious and nonreligious emotional support resources. The initial analysis was based on a series of questions in the NSRFL survey. The questions asked respondents how likely they would be to go to a person about a problem that was bothering them. They chose from the following list: friends from work, neighbors or local friends, a spouse or partner/boyfriend/girlfriend, parents, other family, religious leader (such as pastor, priest, or rabbi), professional therapist, friends from church or place of worship, and friends who live out of town. The list was presented in a random order to each respondent. In order to simplify the subsequent analysis, we collapsed the response categories into a dummy variable, which was

¹ A 33 percent response rate in the cross-sectional sample; 41 percent and 34 percent in the African-American and Hispanic oversamples, respectively.

coded “1” if the respondent answered that he or she was very likely or somewhat likely to go to that source and “0” if the respondent not likely at all to go to that source.²

Appendix A (in the online supplement) provides a summary of responses.³ On average, respondents in our sample indicated that they would go to just under five different types/categories of people for emotional support (mean: 4.81, s.d.: 2.18). Partners were the most likely source of emotional support, with nearly 77 percent of the entire sample reporting that they might turn to a spouse or significant other. After this come other family members (in the 60 percent range), relationships from church (in the 50 percent range), and neighbors and friends (roughly in the 40 percent range). Professional therapists were the least likely source with only 36 percent reporting that they might call on a therapist for emotional support.

Because we are interested in compositional patterns of anticipated emotional support and because it is likely that these patterns can be well represented by a few unobserved latent classes, we used LCA to establish profiles of support. Lazarsfeld and Henry (1968) developed LCA, which is part of a broader set of methods often referred to as finite mixture modeling (McLachlan and Peel 2000). These methods have become increasingly popular statistical tools in a broad range of applied fields. They all hypothesize that a set of unobserved classes can account for the association among cross-classified indicator variables—in this case variations in the perceived sources of emotional support described in Table 1 (Clogg and Goodman 1984; McCutcheon 1987; Vermunt 2010).⁴

We also chose LCA because, unlike more traditional regression analyses, selection effects do not bias the results of LCA. This issue is relevant for us because not everyone in our sample has equal access to each form of social support (i.e., single respondents do not have access to a spouse or partner for social support). In LCA, respondents who do not have access to a particular form of social support are simply more likely to be classified into a latent class that has a low percentage of respondents getting support from that source (Vermunt and Magidson 2004). In this way, these respondents can continue to be accurately included in our analysis and this “selection” does not bias the results.

Two types of parameters are estimated in LCA analysis.⁵ The latent class probabilities identify the relevant prevalence of each latent class. While this parameter can be thought of as the percentage of cases in each latent class, a more accurate analogy would be a mixture or density model, such that each respondent contributes some information to each latent class. The conditional item probabilities are specific to a given class and are the probabilities of observing that specific characteristic in each latent class (McCutcheon 1987; Nylund, Asparouhov, and Muthen 2007; Vermunt 2010). Maximum likelihood estimation in Latent Gold 5.0 was used to maximize the log-likelihood function specified by Vermunt and Magidson (2004).

Recent simulation studies demonstrate that the BIC statistic (Nylund, Asparouhov, and Muthen 2007; Vermunt and Magidson 2004) and the bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT) statistic (Nylund, Asparouhov, and Muthen 2007) are the best methods that determine the number of latent classes that fit the data. See Appendix B in the online supplement for more

²Results of the LCA (available upon request) using the full ordinal variable are substantively identical to the presented results, but are not shown here in order to ease interpretation.

³Questions about potential sources of support were asked prior to questions about religious beliefs and involvement so as not to influence survey responses.

⁴Typically, the categorical responses are assumed to be independent given class membership (Lazarsfeld and Henry 1968; Vermunt 2010).

⁵Latent class models are fit to the data using the Newton-Raphson algorithm for maximum likelihood estimation. Three potential problems with using this algorithm are the possibility of nonidentified parameters, the presence of local maxima, and the occurrence of boundary solutions. We avoided these problems by including more than five indicator variables, estimating models with different sets of random starting values, and close examination of the results to check for boundary solutions (Vermunt and Magidson 2004).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of independent variables

		Mean or %	S.D.
Female	Female dummy variable (1 = female, 0 = male)	50.91%	–
Age	Age of respondent in years (range: 18–79)	39.11	11.96
Married	Respondent is married or cohabiting (0 = single, divorced, separated, or widowed)	56.52%	–
Child under 18 in household	Respondent has one or more children under 18 currently living in their household (1 = one or more children under 18 in the household)	53.32%	–
Education	Highest level of education completed (1 = 8th grade or less to 7 = graduate school)	4.29	1.62
Income	Family income in 2005, before taxes (1 = under \$15,000 to 8 = \$100,000)	4.58	2.24
Employed full time	Respondent is employed full time (0 = employed part time, unemployed, or out of the labor force)	60.46%	–
Black	Respondent is African American	12.80%	–
Hispanic	Respondent is Hispanic	15.39%	–
Catholic	Respondent attends a Catholic church or claims a religious preference for Catholic	27.15%	–
Conservative Protestant	Respondent attends or prefers a church that is part of a conservative Protestant denomination	20.97%	–
No religious affiliation	Respondent claims no religious affiliation, to not be a believer, or be atheist or agnostic	13.55%	–
Frequency of worship attendance	Frequency of religious (worship) services (1 = never to 6 = more than once per week)	3.13	1.70
Religious saliency	Respondent considers him- or herself to be a very religious person	41.72%	–

Note: Results are weighted to match the gender by age distribution of the United States and to account for survey design characteristics.

detailed information on determining the number of latent classes, including a table of model fit measures for different latent class solutions. These criteria indicate that the best fitting model for our data is the four latent class model.

Once the four profiles of anticipated emotional support have been established, we proceed with our analysis by linking covariates, including gender, age, income, race, and religious variations, to the latent classes. We use the three-step maximum likelihood approach with modal assignment proposed by Vermunt (2010) to conduct this analysis. Appendix C provides a detailed description of this approach to linking latent class models with covariates.

Table 1 provides a description of, and the descriptive statistics for, the explanatory variables used in the subsequent analysis.⁶ These variables include gender, age, marital status, parental status, education, income, employment status, race, religious affiliation, church attendance, and religious saliency. These variables are included because prior research indicated their importance

⁶Missing data on many of the independent variables were imputed using hotdeck or regression-based imputation, depending on the variable type. Imputation specifications are available upon request. We would have preferred to use multiple imputation because it has better statistical properties (Little and Rubin 2002). However, multiple imputation is not available in Latent Gold or other programs that can perform a LCA with covariates. Therefore, we use the single imputation methods in order to avoid discarding cases with missing values. We did not impute missing data on the variables used to generate the latent classes.

for understanding support networks, as described. Although not required, LCA with covariates has better statistical properties when using indicator variables, so we generally use them in the subsequent analysis (Bolck, Crook, and Hageaars 2004).

We conclude with a brief analysis of the correlations between one's anticipated support profile and life satisfaction. These models are not presented as a definitive analysis of life satisfaction. Rather they are meant to use the limited measures available in the NSRFL to show the potential application of emotional support profiles for future work on well-being.

In our truncated analytical models, we use four different measures of respondents' assessments of life satisfaction to compare outcomes for each of our anticipated emotional support profiles. These dependent variables were derived from questions asking respondents to report on their overall satisfaction with life, with their relationship to a spouse or romantic partner, with their families, and with their jobs. See Appendix D for a bivariate description of these variables, including the mean score for each profile on each measure of life satisfaction. Standard regression analysis was used to determine if there are correlations between dependent and independent variables. Successive iterations for each model were run using different support profiles as withheld comparison groups to establish significant differences between each of the four profiles.

RESULTS

Our discussion of results is divided into three parts. First, we describe each of our four perceived emotional support profiles as revealed through our LCA. Second, we describe which Americans are more likely to have each particular perceived support profile. Third, we report the results of our analysis investigating the effects of one's perceived support profile on well-being.

Profiles of Anticipated Emotional Support

Table 2 provides the results of our LCA. The column on the left lists the potential sources of emotional support. The remaining columns describe each of the latent classes that were derived from our analysis. We have named these classes religious support, broad support, secular support, and limited support. These labels emphasize the variation across the four profiles, but it is important to reiterate that these profiles do not identify the people from whom the respondent has requested emotional support. Rather, these are profiles of potential supporters—people the respondent can imagine turning to in an emotional crisis. As such, each profile represents a potential strategy for obtaining emotional support.

Table 2 indicates that the religious support profile is the most common in our sample, with a latent class probability of 30.16 percent. This profile is distinctive because, in addition to a spouse or significant other, which is the most common source of support in all the profiles, respondents in the religious support profile are most likely to report that they would turn to their religious leaders (87.65 percent) or friends from church (73.47 percent) for emotional support. The broad support profile has a latent class probability of 26.02 percent. Respondents in this profile are distinctive in that they name a wider range of potential sources of support than do others in our sample, with probability rates ranging from 93.91 percent for family members besides spouse and parents to 52 percent for professional therapists.⁷ This profile is unique because, across the board, its members would turn to each potential support source at higher rates than people in any of the other profiles. The secular support profile, which has a latent class probability of 23.73 percent,

⁷It is unlikely that the "broad" class is a statistical artifact caused by the tendency of respondents to agree on a series of similar questions because the questions were asked in a random order and because the conditional item probabilities range from just over 50 percent to 94 percent, depending on the source of anticipated emotional support.

Table 2: Latent class estimates of sources of anticipated emotional support

	Latent class			
	Religious support	Broad support	Secular support	Limited support
Latent class probability (%)	30.16	26.02	23.73	20.09
Conditional item probability (%)				
Spouse	77.04	87.27	80.98	57.43
Parents	57.48	78.47	72.78	37.85
Other family members	58.82	93.91	78.98	34.61
Religious leader	87.65	92.25	0.38	9.92
Professional therapist	38.09	52.81	30.69	17.13
Neighbor	32.82	84.96	68.00	12.88
Friends from work	25.19	64.94	50.16	13.12
Friends from church	73.47	91.09	18.99	4.70
Friends from out of town	33.77	76.39	55.50	7.50

is distinctive because respondents in this group report very low probabilities of eliciting support from religious connections such as friends from church (18.99 percent) and clergy (.38 percent). Finally, the limited support profile is made up of people who rely most on a spouse or significant other as their source of emotional support. Respondents in this profile are less likely than any other profile to turn to confidants in each source category. The one exception is the religious leader category, in which they score slightly higher than the secular profile. The overall latent class probability for the limited support profile is 20.09 percent.

These four profiles, which have a fairly even distribution in our survey sample, provide a number of important insights into the sources of anticipated emotional support. First, across the board, spouses and other family members are a highly prevalent source of potential support for respondents in each of the profiles. Beyond this, the support source profiles can be understood as two sets of contrasting pairs. The first pair (broad and limited profiles) differs in the breadth of potential support sources that group members may draw upon for emotional support. This divide highlights differences in the number of support categories and not necessarily the total number of confidants. While the broad profile displays a strong propensity to turn to a wide variety of potential supporters, the limited profile is unlikely to turn to anyone besides a spouse or significant other for support in a crisis—and, they are less likely to identify even this one source of support than members of other latent classes. This dichotomy, which is supported by previous findings from Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg (1993) and Liebler and Sandefur (2002), provides a different way to think about social isolation. It is not reliant upon counting the sheer number of contacts available, which can be inaccurate (Fischer 2009; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2009), but rather focuses on the breadth and, hence, versatility of one’s anticipated supportive resource types.⁸

The second pair (religious and secular profiles) divides along religious lines. It consists of a religious support profile containing members who expect a significant portion of their emotional support to come from church friends or clergy, and a secular support profile, which is made up of people who are very unlikely to turn to religious communities as a potential source of emotional support. The divide between religious and secular is also apparent looking *across* all four profiles. While members of the religious and broad support profiles regularly identify religious leaders

⁸For a full picture of people’s support networks, it is important to consider the number of contacts and the breath of sources. These factors both contribute in different ways to network health and resiliency.

and friends from church as anticipated sources for their emotional needs, those in both the secular and limited support profiles are extremely unlikely to turn to religious sources of support. This distinction is not acknowledged in the existing literature as an organizing dimension of the composition of emotional support.

Characteristics of Anticipated Support Profile Members

Having established the four profiles of anticipated emotional support, we next determine how gender, age, income, race, and religious characteristics are associated with each profile. Table 3 presents the results of the maximum-likelihood-based correction method proposed by Vermunt (2010), using modal assignment⁹ as described. These results can be interpreted like a standard multinomial logistic regression comparing each profile to the other three profiles. In particular, Panel A compares the religious support profile to the other three profiles, Panel B compares the broad support profile to the secular and limited support profiles, and Panel C compares the secular support to the limited support profiles. These comparisons provide a clear picture of the demographic distinctions of each profile.

We find that women are more likely than men to be prevalent in the broad profile than in the religious or the limited. They are also more prevalent in the secular profile than in the limited. This finding is consistent with previous research that shows that women have wider and more diverse support networks than men. However, unlike previous research, our findings do not clearly show gender differences in religious support. Compared to men, women are not significantly less likely to fit the secular profile than the broad or the religious profiles. These findings suggest that, in the area of perceived support, women differentiate from men more in breadth than in the religiosity of their networks.

Our findings on perceived emotional support are clearly consistent with the prevailing evidence indicating that as people grow older, their support networks shrink. Older people are more likely to fit the limited support profile than the religious, secular, or broad support profiles. While most studies in the literature show that the actual number of confidants drops with age (Rook 2009), our findings indicate that the elderly also draw from fewer sources or categories of potential support, which means they may also have less versatile emotional support networks.

Though Mickelson and Kubzansky (2003) report that higher levels of both education and income are associated with higher levels of emotional support, our study found very few relationships between education and support profiles, the difference between the religious and secular profiles being the only exception. Income, however, was a prevalent predictor for higher levels of perceived support in our models. The results from Table 3 show that, in general, those with higher incomes are significantly more likely to fit the broad or secular support profiles as opposed to the religious or limited profiles.

African Americans are significantly more likely to have either limited support profiles, which rely almost exclusively on a spouse or significant other, or religious profiles that rely mainly on a spouse and relationships in the church. They are unlikely to have support from a broad range of social categories or to develop support profiles that exclude members of their church. These findings highlight the important social role that churches play in African-American communities (cf. Ellison and Sherkat 1995). When African Americans do not draw upon religious sources of support, their emotional support networks tend to be limited.

Hispanics are roughly twice as likely to fit into the limited support profile as any other. In contrast to our findings, other research has shown that within the Mexican context, Hispanics often reach out to their extended families for social support (Kana'iaupuni et al. 2005) so this

⁹Results of the analysis using proportional assignment (available upon request) are substantively similar, although, as in Vermunt's (2010) simulations, somewhat more conservative.

Table 3: Results from LCA with covariates using the 3-step ML method

<i>Panel A: Comparing religious support to</i>							
	Broad support		Secular support		Limited support		
	OR	S.E.	OR	S.E.	OR	S.E.	
Female	1.30*	(.11)	1.23*	(.10)	.98	(.10)	
Age	.99	(.01)	.99	(.01)	1.03***	(.01)	
Married	.86	(.10)	.75**	(.10)	.91	(.11)	
Child under 18 in household	.92	(.10)	.88	(.10)	.84	(.11)	
Education	1.10	(.07)	1.21**	(.07)	1.10	(.07)	
Income	1.11*	(.05)	1.13*	(.05)	.91	(.06)	
Employed full time	1.22*	(.10)	1.19*	(.10)	1.32**	(.11)	
Black	.63**	(.12)	.52***	(.13)	1.05	(.15)	
Hispanic	.85	(.13)	.82	(.13)	1.59**	(.15)	
Catholic	1.07	(.13)	1.34*	(.13)	1.24	(.15)	
Conservative Protestant	.82	(.13)	.72*	(.15)	.86	(.17)	
No religious affiliation	1.43	(.35)	2.95***	(.28)	3.02***	(.30)	
Frequency of worship attendance	.97	(.06)	.49***	(.07)	.57***	(.07)	
Religious saliency	1.09	(.10)	.84	(.10)	.77*	(.11)	

Panel B: Comparing broad support to

	Secular support		Limited support	
	OR	S.E.	OR	S.E.
Female	.93	(.13)	.71*	(.09)
Age	1.01	(.01)	1.03***	(.01)
Married	.85	(.12)	1.04	(.16)
Child under 18 in household	.97	(.14)	.85	(.13)
Education	1.07	(.05)	.99	(.05)
Income	1.01	(.04)	.90**	(.02)
Employed full time	.94	(.13)	1.13	(.17)
Black	.72	(.11)	1.88**	(.35)
Hispanic	.96	(.17)	2.44***	(.48)
Catholic	1.52*	(.27)	1.29	(.26)
Conservative Protestant	.83	(.18)	.99	(.23)
No religious affiliation	3.17**	(.51)	3.11***	(.54)
Frequency of worship attendance	.58**	(.03)	.60***	(.03)
Religious saliency	.64*	(.09)	.58***	(.09)

Panel C: Comparing secular support to

	Limited support	
	OR	S.E.
Female	.71*	(.10)
Age	1.04***	(.01)
Married	1.22	(.18)
Child under 18 in household	.87	(.13)
Education	.93	(.04)
Income	.88***	(.03)

(Continued)

Table 3 (Continued)

<i>Panel C: Comparing secular support to</i>		
	Limited support	
	OR	S.E.
Employed full time	1.20	(.17)
Black	2.20***	(.48)
Hispanic	2.14***	(.45)
Catholic	.85	(.18)
Conservative Protestant	1.19	(.29)
No religious affiliation	.94	(.20)
Frequency of worship attendance	1.04	(.05)
Religious saliency	.91	(.13)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; $N = 2,314$.

limited support profile may be imposed by factors such as immigration, which can attenuate extended family networks.

Religious tradition plays an important role in perceived or anticipated emotional support. Beginning with the most intuitive results, conservative Protestants are more likely to be in the religious support profile than the secular profile. This finding is consistent with a long line of research that suggests that conservative Protestant congregations build encompassing religious subcultures (Smith 1998). On the other hand, those who claim no religious affiliation are extremely unlikely to fit into either the religious support or the broad support profile since each of these profiles are constituted with people who draw on religious resources for emotional support. This strengthens the claims that religious “nones” are a distinctive group that needs more scholarly attention (Baker and Smith 2009).

The findings for the Catholic tradition are somewhat surprising, however. Our models suggest that Catholics are most likely to fit the secular support profile and unlikely to fit into the religious support profile. This strongly suggests that compared to other religious traditions, Catholics are much less likely to look to their priests or fellow churchgoers for emotional support. Though it is not widely discussed in the literature, this finding does line up with research conducted by Taylor and Chatters (1988). It is possible that, due to differences in religious culture or to the large size of many Catholic parishes, Catholics are more likely to view churches as “houses of worship,” or places to go for rituals and spiritual connection, than as a source of friendship or support (Becker 1999).

Church attendance and religious saliency are significant indicators for the emotional support profiles. Those who attend church more are much more likely to develop relationships with their pastors, priests, and fellow parishioners, and those who see themselves as highly religious are more likely to seek emotional support from religious sources. Catholics are an exception to this pattern, as noted.

Well-Being and Anticipated Emotional Support Profiles

The final step in our analysis is an investigation of the relationship between one’s anticipated support profile and life satisfaction. In the truncated analytical models that follow, we used four different measures of respondents’ assessments of life satisfaction to compare outcomes for each of our emotional support profiles. These dependent variables were derived from questions asking respondents to report on their overall satisfaction with life, with their relationship to a spouse or romantic partner, with their families, and with their jobs. These measures, available in the NSRFL, provide a window into the larger issue of well-being, though of course they are not exhaustive.

Table 4: Simplified results from multiple regression comparing profile outcomes for models^a of satisfaction and well-being

Life satisfaction	Relationship happiness	Family satisfaction	Job satisfaction
	Broad > Limited Broad > Secular	Broad > Church	Limited > Secular

Note: Results indicate significant differences between emotional support profiles at $p < .05$ or less.

^aAll models included the following control variables: gender, age, education, marriage, children, income, black, Hispanic, employed, worship attendance, religious saliency, Catholic, conservative Protestant, no religious affiliation. Full models available upon request.

Successive iterations for standard regression models were run using different support profiles as withheld comparison groups to establish significant differences between each of the four profiles. The full models include controls for education, age, income, gender, marital status, children, race, work status, belief in biblical literalism, spiritual saliency, and religious denomination. Because these models are purely demonstrative, we have here presented a table of results that is drastically simplified.¹⁰

Table 4 displays the support profile results for the four satisfaction models. Each cell lists only the significant difference between the emotional support profiles for each of the life satisfaction measures. The results show that even when we include a wide range of theoretically meaningful controls, the support profiles are often significant predictors for satisfaction.

Looking at Table 4, we can see that one’s profile of anticipated emotional support has implications for relationship happiness, family satisfaction, and job satisfaction. As might be expected, the broad support profile is associated with the most positive outcomes, even when controlling for a host of other factors. The contrast between the broad support profile and the religious support profile indicates that there are, at times, clear differences between churchgoers who rely almost exclusively on their family and church relationships for support and those who draw from a wide variety of resources including secular networks. This suggests that the effect of religious support is contextual, depending in part on how religious support is combined with other sources of support into a profile of supportive relationships.

Because it draws from the fewest potential support categories, it might seem logical that the limited profile would be least associated with satisfaction in various areas of life. The results of these models, however, are mixed. On the one hand we see that, controlling for all other factors in the model, people in this profile are significantly less likely to report high levels of relationship happiness than people in the broad support category. On the other hand, we see that the limited support group scores significantly higher on job satisfaction than the secular group. Finally, the secular support profile is negatively correlated with relationship happiness compared to the broad support profile and negatively correlated with job satisfaction compared to the limited support profile. The finding for relationship satisfaction is not surprising, given prior research that shows that religious involvement is associated with happiness in marital and other family relationships (Sherkat and Ellison 1999). Further research is needed on the relationship between secular social support and other areas of life satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to developing and describing new compositional profiles of anticipated emotional support networks, a number of important issues emerged in our analysis that raise questions to

¹⁰Full models are available upon request.

guide future research. The findings in this article reemphasize the point that religion serves as a major source of potential support for a significant portion of the American population (cf. Ellison and George 1994; Putnam and Campbell 2010). People in both the religious and broad profiles rely heavily on friends from church and religious leaders for emotional support. We demonstrate that religious support must be understood as both variable and contextual; it is one important resource that may or may not be combined with other, secular resources, and differences in one's overall combination of religious and secular support resources may have implications for well-being.

Our study highlights important religious, gendered, and racial distinctions in patterns of perceived emotional support; social location plays a decisive role in shaping one's overall profile of perceived emotional support. It is somewhat surprising to discover that Catholics are much more likely to fit the secular profile than the religious or broad profile. Though the work of Taylor and Chatters (1988) has briefly addressed this Catholic distinctiveness, the overwhelming majority of work on religion and social support has focused on Protestant churches. These findings suggest that much more research needs to focus on the unique patterns in Catholics' emotional support structures. Our comparative models also confirm the importance of gender as a key determinant of emotional support by extending the analysis to perceived support profiles.

Next, we demonstrate the importance of race. We find that African Americans take a bimodal approach to anticipate emotional social support, either relying heavily on church relationships or fitting a profile with very few support resources aside from a spouse or significant other. While the Black Church's role in providing social support has received much scholarly attention, the perceived lack of potential resources for African Americans outside the church warrants further investigation, as does the limited support profile that is prevalent for the growing group of Hispanics in America.

Finally, our study raises questions about the relationships between these overall profiles of perceived emotional support and well-being. While we have demonstrated a clear link between our profiles and specific measures of life satisfaction, more work needs to be done to specify the linkages between the broader composition of people's emotional support profiles and their health and well-being.

While our study clearly demonstrates the importance of studying compositional patterns of anticipated support, it does have limitations. These are mainly due to a lack of sufficient measures in our data set. We were unable to investigate the important question of how people combine various support resources into networks of mobilized emotional support, or into other types of support networks (such as networks of informal helping or caretaking). Furthermore, while the profiles in this research were constructed using a broad list of potential support resources, including family, friends, and religious and nonreligious professionals, other sources of support could not be examined, including the contributions of other family members (siblings, adult children, and extended family), and the role of friends who are not from church, work, or the neighborhood. Each of these shortcomings should be addressed in future research, building on our findings about the importance of including religious sources in analyses of the overall composition of support networks.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Appendix A. Descriptive Summary of Potential Sources of Emotional Support

Appendix B. Determining the Number of Latent Classes

Appendix C. Linking the Latent Class Model to Covariates

Appendix D. Bivariate Independent Variable Descriptives for Models of Satisfaction